

## CHECKLIST ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

Project Name: Musselshell Wind Easement	Proposed Implementation Date: Summer 2012
Proponent: Musselshell Wind Project LLC and Musselshell Wind Project Two LLC	
Type and Purpose of Action: Amendment of Easement 14168 to allow minor course change and application for new easement for a 124' road and transmission line crossing within the same section. The purpose of the road and transmission line easements are to facilitate windfarm development on adjacent private land.	
Location: Section16, Twp 6N Rge 18E	County: Wheatland

### PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

<p>1. PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT, AGENCIES, GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS CONTACTED: Provide a brief chronology of the scoping and ongoing involvement for this project.</p>	<p>State Land Lessee</p> <p>The Wheatland County Commissioners and Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks were scoped and DFWP provided comment on the environmental analysis of Easement 14168. The additional environmental affect of a minor course change and 124' road crossing do not warrant additional scoping.</p>
<p>2. OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES WITH JURISDICTION, LIST OF PERMITS NEEDED:</p>	<p>Montana Department of Environmental Quality, Storm Water Discharge Permit.</p> <p>Wheatland County – County road use and electrical transmission crossing of the county road.</p>
<p>3. ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:</p>	<p>The project proponent has made application to secure right of way easement on state school trust land for road and transmission lines to facilitate wind energy development on adjoining private land. Roads would be used to facilitate construction and to allow continuing access to the windfarm during operation. During windfarm construction all roads on the subject lands will have heavy daily vehicle traffic. After construction the following daily vehicle travel is anticipated:</p> <p>Scheduled maintenance of wind turbine generators</p>

	<p>will be quarterly (four times per year) for quarterly lube checks and bi-annual scheduled maintenance.</p> <p>Unscheduled maintenance is anticipated to be minimal.</p> <p>Section 16 – The project proponent proposes to construct 1,348’ of road and reconstruct 3,203’ of existing road in order to install and maintain a proposed electrical transmission line. The electrical transmission line would lie within the area of the road easement. The road would also be used for access to deeded land for windfarm construction. A road width of 35’ is necessary for large crane access to the windfarm site. A land use license will be issued for the additional construction road width. Post windfarm development, roads will be reclaimed to a 16’ graveled surface.</p> <p>Section 16 – The project proponent proposes to construct 124’ of new road across the north east corner of Section 16 to allow placement of a wind turbine on adjacent private land.</p> <p>No Action – The proposed road construction and reconstruction and transmission lines would not be installed on state trust land.</p>
--	--

IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
<p>4. GEOLOGY AND SOIL QUALITY, STABILITY AND MOISTURE: Are fragile, compactable or unstable soils present? Are there unusual geological features? Are there special reclamation considerations?</p>	<p>[N] The subject area is on the southeast edge of the Shawmut Anticline, a domed feature which is drained by Mud Creek. The geological survey of Montana depicts section 16 as Judith River Formation</p> <p>A gravel deposit of commercial value exists on section 17 and likely extends along the ridge in section 16. Any easement issued on section 16 will allow for movement of the road in the event the State desires to mine the gravel deposit.</p>

IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT	
5. WATER QUALITY, QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION: Are important surface or groundwater resources present? Is there potential for violation of ambient water quality standards, drinking water maximum contaminant levels, or degradation of water quality?	[N] No surface water features present.
6. AIR QUALITY: Will pollutants or particulate be produced? Is the project influenced by air quality regulations or zones (Class I airshed)?	[N] The project is located within a Class II Airshed. A small increase of dust particulate and equipment exhaust is expected during construction.

## IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

<p>7. VEGETATION COVER, QUANTITY AND QUALITY: Will vegetative communities be permanently altered? Are any rare plants or cover types present?</p>	<p>[Y] The rangelands are located in the Western Sedimentary Plains geographic area in a 10 to 14 inch precipitation zone. The general topography is rolling hills. There are several range sites associated with the project area and include; Silty, Shallow, Thin Hilly and Clayey.</p> <p><b>Silty</b> The dominant native grasses associated with the silty range site includes; western wheatgrass and needle and thread and to a lesser extent, Bluebunch wheatgrass, green needlegrass, blue grama, sandburgs bluegrass, and threadleaf sedge.</p> <p><b>Shallow</b> The dominant native grasses associated with shallow range site includes; Bluebunch wheatgrass, threadleaf sedge, and needle and thread grass.</p> <p><b>Thin Breaks</b> The dominant native grasses (and grass like plants) associated with the thin breaks range site includes; needle and thread grass, threadleaf sedge, and ponderosa pine.</p> <p><b>Clayey</b> The dominant native plants associated with the clayey range site includes; western wheatgrass, and big sagebrush. The site is rated in fair to good ecological condition.</p> <p>Knapweed was introduced to the project area from natural gas pipeline construction and there is concerns on the part of the state land lessee that road and transmission line construction will worsen the infestation. A weed management plan has been developed which provides a baseline inventory of existing noxious weeds, an apportionment of responsibility between state land users and an annual meeting to discuss weed control objectives.</p>
---	---

## IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

<p>8. <b>TERRESTRIAL, AVIAN AND AQUATIC LIFE AND HABITATS:</b> Is there substantial use of the area by important wildlife, birds or fish?</p>	<p>[N] The project is located within sage grouse habitat but is not within a core sage grouse recovery area. Sage grouse leks are located on private land 2.5 miles west of affected state section 16 in section 18.</p> <p>The South Shawmut county road lies between the leks and proposed road and transmission line on 16. Any impacts from vehicular travel to the sage grouse leks already occur due to the proximity of this major county road. No additional impact is expected on these leks from the proposed actions on state land.</p> <p>There may be some disruption of sage grouse nesting and brood rearing as a result of the proposed action as most sage grouse nest within two miles of a lek. The southeastern sections of the project area contains suitable sagebrush steppe habitat, but no greater sage grouse were observed on the site during more than a year of surveys, and no lek activity was recorded on site. The subject state trust land represents a small portion of available sage brush nesting and brood rearing habitat and any disruption resulting from the proposed activities is expected to be minor.</p>
<p>9. <b>UNIQUE, ENDANGERED, FRAGILE OR LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES:</b> Are any federally listed threatened or endangered species or identified habitat present? Any wetlands? Sensitive Species or Species of special concern?</p>	<p>[N] A search of the Montana Heritage Program database indicates the following sensitive species have been identified on lands within one mile of the project area; greater sage grouse, longbill curlew, golden eagle, pinion jay and brewers sparrow.</p>
<p>10. <b>HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES:</b> Are any historical, archeological, or paleontological resources present?</p>	<p>[Y] A class three cultural resources survey has been conducted under contract by Cardno-Entrix. No National Register of Historic Properties eligible or major cultural resources were discovered and no adverse affect to cultural resources is anticipated.</p>
<p>11. <b>AESTHETICS:</b> Is the project on a prominent topographical feature? Will it be visible from populated or scenic areas? Will there be excessive noise or light?</p>	<p>[N] Existing two track trails will be improved to a gravel surface. These roads are not prominently located and no off site visual effects are anticipated.</p>

### IMPACTS ON THE PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

12.	DEMANDS ON ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES OF LAND, WATER, AIR OR ENERGY: Will the project use resources that are limited in the area? Are there other activities nearby that will affect the project?	[N] The Cenex, Northwestern and Front Range oil and natural gas pipelines cross the subject property. These projects introduced knapweed into the project area.
13.	OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENTS PERTINENT TO THE AREA: Are there other studies, plans or projects on this tract?	[Y] Wheatland County Land Use Ordinance. The proposed project is in compliance with the Wheatland County land use ordinance and has received permit to use county roads.

### III. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

14.	HUMAN HEALTH AND SAFETY: Will this project add to health and safety risk in the area?	[N]
15.	INDUSTRIAL, COMMERCIAL AND AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES AND PRODUCTION: Will the project add to or alter these activities?	[N] The state land component of the project is minor road and transmission line construction and will have negligible effect on industrial activity.
16.	QUANTITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF EMPLOYMENT: Will the project create, move or eliminate jobs? If so, estimated number.	[N] Road construction and transmission line placement will result in a small increase in short term employment.
17.	LOCAL AND STATE TAX BASE AND TAX REVENUES: Will the project create or eliminate tax revenue?	[N]
18.	DEMAND FOR GOVERNMENT SERVICES: Will substantial traffic be added to existing roads? Will other services (fire protection, police, schools, etc.) be needed?	[N] A small increase in demand for county road services will occur.
19.	LOCALLY ADOPTED ENVIRONMENTAL PLANS AND GOALS: Are there State, County, City, USFS, BLM, Tribal, etc., zoning or management plans in effect?	[Y] Wheatland County Land Use Ordinance

### III. IMPACTS ON THE HUMAN POPULATION

20.	ACCESS TO AND QUALITY OF RECREATIONAL AND WILDERNESS ACTIVITIES: Are wilderness or recreational areas nearby or accessed through this tract? Is there recreational potential within the tract?	[Y] The use of the roads on section 16 during project construction will require closing these parcels to recreational use during construction. Post construction disruption of hunting will occur due to wind farm operator vehicle use of section 16. The project proponent has agreed to implement a best management practice where road use on section 16 would be avoided for one hour at dusk and dawn. This is expected to reduce but not eliminate land use conflict between the wind farm operator and hunting public.
21.	DENSITY AND DISTRIBUTION OF POPULATION AND HOUSING: Will the project add to the population and require additional housing?	[N]
22.	SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND MORES: Is some disruption of native or traditional lifestyles or communities possible?	[N]
23.	CULTURAL UNIQUENESS AND DIVERSITY: Will the action cause a shift in some unique quality of the area?	[N]
24.	OTHER APPROPRIATE SOCIAL AND ECONOMICAL CIRCUMSTANCES:	[Y] A seven thousand dollar annual payment has been negotiated for use state land for road access and electrical transmission.

EA Checklist Prepared By: Clive Rooney, NELO Area Manager

\_\_\_\_s/Clive Rooney/s\_\_\_\_  
Signature  
Date: 7/10/12

### IV. FINDING

25.	ALTERNATIVE SELECTED:	Action alternative
26.	SIGNIFICANCE OF POTENTIAL	No significant impact

<b>IV. FINDING</b>	
<b>IMPACTS:</b>	
27. Need for Further Environmental Analysis:	
<input type="checkbox"/> EIS <input type="checkbox"/> More Detailed EA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No Further Analysis	

EA Checklist Approved by:

Jeanne Holmgren, Real Estate Management Bureau Chief

\_\_\_\_\_  
s/Jeannie Holmgren/s

Signature

Date: 7/10/12